

Staff Report

TO: Steering Advisory Committee members
Yolo County Habitat JPA

FROM: Maria Wong
Executive Director

DATE: August 9, 2010

SUBJECT: Response to SAC Concern Regarding Habitat Suitability Valuation of Natural
Lands

The SAC inquired whether the NHP should also incorporate and utilize suitability valuations of Natural Lands similar to the approach proposed for the agricultural landscape. SAIC's response is attached.

August 3, 2010

To: Maria Wong
From: SAIC
Subject: Response to SAC Concern Regarding Habitat Suitability Valuation of Natural Lands

SAIC has reviewed the previous decision to not use habitat suitability ratings for use in developing conservation measures for non-agricultural (“*natural*”) habitats for covered species at the request of the Steering Advisory Committee. We do not recommend changing the current systems of recording acreages of suitable habitat for natural lands, and calculating *habitat units* (= acres x habitat suitability rating from 0.0 – 1.0) for agricultural lands. The reasons for this recommendation are:

- The range of crops that may be grown on agricultural lands are more variable in their suitability as habitat for covered species than natural habitats. Some crops having very high value, but many having low to moderate per-acre values. Some low value crops, however, have large acreages and thus may contribute to species conservation. Use of habitat units captures this variable condition well.
- Various agricultural crop types also vary in their amounts and locations to a much greater extent than do natural habitats, warranting more careful tracking of habitat values. Natural habitats are largely stable in their amounts and locations, except over substantial time periods.
- Generally, natural habitats were rated as suitable if they were considered of moderate to high suitability. Low quality natural habitats that may be used by species infrequently or at low densities were not considered suitable. Therefore, the range in habitat quality of suitable natural habitats is not substantial.
- Numerous Wildlife Habitat Relationships validation studies of natural habitats have shown that the ability to finely distinguish the relative quality of natural habitats for wildlife species is not highly refined, so introducing habitat ratings increases precision, but not necessarily accuracy. The valuation of various crop types for each of the covered species is based on research and the expertise of individuals with knowledge of how the species use various crop types within and adjacent to the Plan Area.
- Conservation strategies for agricultural lands are based largely on the habitat conditions that are provided for covered species. In contrast, conservation strategies for natural lands rely more on protection and maintenance of general ecosystem processes and values. Therefore, fine distinctions in habitat values of one or several species is not likely to modify the conservation strategies that are eventually adopted.